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ABSTRACT

Successful employer engagement requires that colleges in the United Kingdom secure employers' involvement in the design, development, management, and delivery of post-16 learning so that the skill needs of employers and the workforce will be met and the increased productivity, competitiveness, and efficiency of individual organizations and the wider economy will be supported. The Success for All strategy gives colleges and providers the incentives and support to form much closer relationships with employers. Providers are asked to specify and deliver on one of two possible headline improvement targets in relation to the following: (1) the development of improved services direct to employers; or (2) increased employability or work readiness of learners. In order to promote employer involvement, colleges and providers will need to consider radical changes to their mission and purpose. Those changes include the following: (1) the development of a mission that recognizes employers as customers analogous to the approach taken with individual students; (2) the enhancement of management information systems to provide timely and ongoing data on the extent and type of employer engagement; (3) a policy on the costing and pricing provision for companies; and (4) a system of regularly updated surveys of employer needs and satisfaction. (Includes examples of employer engagement, a description of the 5 dimensions of a "college for business," a headline improvement target, and 17 references.) (MO)

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About the guide

This guide provides ideas on how to engage employers effectively in post-16 learning. It gives examples of how colleges and providers are currently responding to the needs of employers and their employees, with suggestions for extending this practice. It should be of interest to LSC-funded colleges and providers and local Learning and Skills Councils when considering and agreeing headline improvement targets for employer engagement in response to *Success for all*.[1]

The guide has three sections. It:

Section 1 considers the rationale for securing effective employer engagement and the role of the FE sector in bringing this about

Section 2 discusses the implications of increased employer engagement

Section 3 suggests how headline improvement targets for employer engagement could be interpreted by providing examples of what achieving these might mean in practice.

Employer engagement and skills for productivity

Employer engagement is seen as vital to the development of skills for productivity. The term is useful shorthand but it underpins the need to secure employers' involvement in the design, development, management and delivery of post-16 learning. Provision that is responsive to the skill needs of employers and the workforce will support the increased productivity, competitiveness and efficiency of individual organisations and the wider economy.

Individual employers may be important leaders in the promotion of learning, but a wide range of people within companies also need to be engaged in learning or its promotion. Different priorities and modes of operating might exist within the same firm between, for instance, the training manager and the production manager. The most effective access point in some companies may be the human resources director, training manager, site supervisor or union learning representative. In very small firms or partnerships, there may be no 'employer' as such. The terms 'employer', 'company' and 'firm' are therefore used as appropriate throughout this guide.

Relevance to mission

LSC has emphasised that the headline improvement target for employer engagement should be relevant to a college or provider's individual mission and the nature of their provision. Although some colleges or providers supply very little direct to employers, all must be concerned with the increased employability and work readiness of their learners. Not all learners will enter the workforce directly from their current course, but awareness of the demands of the workplace and insight into how to apply knowledge and skills in practice are valuable to all. Employers, and the economy generally, will also benefit from recruits who are better prepared for the world of work. All post-16 providers within the LSC's remit should therefore consider employer engagement targets as relevant. The guide reflects different forms of engagement that may be pursued, taking account of the individual missions of colleges and providers.

Rationale for employer engagement

All change together

The policy emphasis during the first decade of college incorporation[2] was on securing participation and quality in the education and training of individual learners, and full-time 16–19 year olds in particular. Despite many difficulties, great strides were made in increased efficiency, widening participation and improved achievement and retention. Provision for adults in general was not neglected, but it could be argued that workforce development came some way down the agenda. This emphasis was reflected not only in the policies and systems of individual colleges, but also in the design of qualifications, the inspection framework, the funding methodology and the performance indicators used to measure the effectiveness of providers.

The national agenda has now moved on for companies and for colleges and providers. The contribution of the FE sector to delivering the skills and knowledge required for the current workforce and the workforce of the future is now explicitly acknowledged within, and intrinsic to the success of, government policy. At the same time, the pace of change in some occupational sectors is breathtaking and, in almost all cases, expectations of performance in the workplace are higher than ever. Dialogue and exchange of ideas between further education and its customers – employers, employees and individuals – is even more important if the match between expectations and what is delivered is to be more exact. This is hard enough when needs remain stable, but extremely demanding during periods of change or when trying to anticipate future skill needs. Effective employer engagement in post 16 learning therefore needs to be a central part of the FE sector's mission, rather than a marginal and optional activity.

Both the DfES and the LSC recognise the importance of the post-16 learning and skills sector in securing skills for productivity. The *Success for all* strategy will give colleges and providers the incentives and support to form much closer relationships with employers. These include:

- expanding the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) network to 400 by 2006
- raising the profile of college responsiveness to employer needs in the inspection process
- ensuring the pattern of provision matches the local needs of individuals and employers through Strategic Area Reviews (StARs)
- colleges signing up to headline improvement targets for employer engagement as part of their 3-year funding and development plans.

The government Skills Strategy[3] will build on these themes and include proposals to strengthen the capacity of colleges and providers to respond to employers' skill needs.

New markets for further education

Even without this policy change, many colleges have realised that although much of their growth in the recent past came from full-time provision for 16–19 year olds, this market is now saturated and in many areas of the country one provider will now only grow at the expense of another.

Although employer engagement is about more than providing customised training for companies, such work can be rewarding in both financial and developmental terms. Many medium-sized and large companies now see the benefit of developing their workforce to become more competitive. There are opportunities for large contracts, involving a significant proportion of the workforce, to upgrade the skills of existing staff and develop unskilled employees who may also have basic skills needs. Providers can also develop services to support in-company training, such as help with diagnosis of needs and the administration of qualifications. Meeting the needs of micro, small and medium-sized companies is clearly more taxing, but many colleges have formed productive relationships with small firms, or groups of them, and have found mutually advantageous ways of working together.

However, all this work requires flexible approaches and a 'can-do' attitude, and may have implications for the way the whole college operates.

Change driven by legislation and licences to operate

Changes to company practice are increasingly driven by legislation or voluntary arrangements developed by sectors to provide a 'licence to operate'. For instance, the rail, construction and security industries need to demonstrate that their workers are appropriately qualified and, in some sectors, legislation may require whole sections of the workforce to become better qualified. This already applies to staff in care homes, for example. In the context of small care homes, the need for staff to secure qualifications may place significant pressure on the time and financial resources of the organisation. In many cases, employees may be starting from a modest base in terms of their qualifications and experience of formal learning. The FE sector needs to adapt their practice to take account of these differing circumstances, so becoming a valuable resource for employers who are required to upskill their workforce.

Demand for skills

It is recognised that to enhance the performance of the UK workforce, the demand for skills, as well as supply, must be improved. As the Cabinet Office's Strategy Unit notes,[4] employers see training as a derived demand emerging from their need to achieve other objectives, such as improved productivity, or the development of new markets or products. However, supply can influence demand; the provision of learning programmes and qualifications that are demonstrably fit for purpose could also have the effect of driving up demand.

An important role for colleges

Success for all reiterated the increased level of importance placed on the role of colleges in working with companies to meet the nation's skills needs. Colleges and major providers are seen as significant players in promoting employer involvement in learning. Many colleges and providers have made great efforts to develop effective employer engagement despite a background of competing priorities. The CoVE programme demonstrates how high-quality provision can be developed, and it is important that this good work is built upon and integrated across institutions.

The headline improvement targets

Success for all suggested that colleges and providers should develop employer engagement in relation to their distinctive mission and context. The LSC consultation on this concluded that providers would be asked to specify and deliver on one of two possible headline improvement targets in relation to:

A the development of improved services direct to employers or

B increased employability or work readiness of learners.

Many colleges will already be actively engaged in both these areas of activity, and will want to continue this work. For others, employer engagement targets may require a significant shift of emphasis. While the targets in themselves are extremely important, some colleges will wish to go beyond them and consider more fundamental changes to what they do. Interim findings from recent research undertaken by ECOTEC[5] reported that most colleges see the importance of employer engagement and are keen to extend this aspect of their mission. Also, the areas for development implied in the headline improvement target – improved services for employers and improved work readiness and employability – are not mutually exclusive. LSDA research suggests that activity in one of these areas will reinforce the other and also enhance the demand for training.

Implications for the FE sector

As described in Section 1, employer demand for skills is likely to be stimulated by provision that supports business success and organisational performance. Also, the development of more responsive provision requires the engagement of employers. This raises a number of issues for the development of the infrastructure of both the FE sector and the provider network.

Qualifications framework and funding flexibility

The Skills Strategy will set out plans for creating funding incentives for the development of effective working relationships between employers and providers. This will remove barriers to responsive provision in the funding system and ensure that the qualifications framework is flexible enough to encourage employers to invest in vocational qualifications. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and LSC have been looking at developing a more flexible qualifications system, and QCA have been asked to put in place a unitised qualifications framework. This should make it much easier for provision to be customised to meet employers' specific needs, and accredited.

An individual company record

Other developments may still be needed, however. For instance, although there is now an individual learner record for all post-16 learners wherever they are located, there is not yet an equivalent record of employers as customers of the LSC sector. Most colleges and providers have records of companies with whom they have links, but there are often several such databases, leading to coordination and updating problems. Local LSCs are also producing such databases, and there is work to be done on linking them to the records kept by providers so that they can inform each other.

Towards an employer charter

Colleges have been encouraged to produce student charters that outline the expectations and responsibilities of colleges in respect to provision for individual learners. The criteria for the 'college for business' (see Appendix 1) could form the basis of an employers' charter, which would make explicit the provider's level of service and so inform employers' expectations.

Implications for the development of colleges and providers

Almost all the principals consulted by ECOTEC[6] believed that their college should become more responsive to employers' needs and over half saw the need to become much more responsive. Many general FE colleges have a Business Development Unit. These 'units' have various titles, but their core business is usually to provide bespoke courses for local companies at full cost. However, to make a full contribution to improving the skills of the nation's workforce and the development of the local and regional economies, it is important that the focus on employer engagement permeates the mainstream activities of the college or provider. By definition this has implications for the mission, leadership and systems of the college or provider.

Planning for employer engagement

If promoting employer involvement is to be more than a cosmetic exercise, colleges and providers will need to consider radical changes to their mission and purpose. The extent of these changes will vary, but as a minimum it may be useful to consider:

- the development of a mission that recognises employers as customers analogous to the approach taken with individual students
- the creation of appropriate databases, allowing a single checkpoint on contact history, and the nature of the company
- the enhancement of management information systems (MIS) to provide timely and ongoing data on the extent and type of employer engagement
- an employer-related strand to staff development programmes
- a policy on the costing and pricing of provision for companies (including provision of support)
- a system of regularly updated surveys of employer need and satisfaction (analogous to existing learner and staff surveys)
- a 'reception' system such as a dedicated helpline and contact point.

Questions to consider in planning for employer engagement

The planning and delivery of the post-16 curriculum will need to be informed by consideration of important questions, including the following.

- Strategically, is the need to meet local and regional skills needs reflected in the college or provider mission?
- Operationally, has the college or provider:
  - identified local skills needs and planned to meet them?
  - identified a clear role for itself in relation to meeting skills needs and engaging employers?

- Do managers and curriculum leaders ensure that strategies and mechanisms to promote employer engagement are core activities across the college or provider?
- Are employers involved in the:
  - design and delivery of learning programmes?
  - assessment and monitoring of learning?
- Does the college or provider monitor the impact of their work with employers?
  - Is feedback from employers systematically collected and acted upon?
  - Are there means of ensuring that feedback from employers influences teaching, training and learning, and that the learning programmes on offer meet the needs of employers and their employees?
- Are specific needs of employers accommodated? What activities and services do the college or provider offer to meet individual employers' training and business needs?

In the production of the 3-year development plan, colleges and providers will agree their specific headline improvement target for employer engagement in discussion with their local LSC. Working through this list of questions should support the identification of an appropriately challenging target, measure and performance indicator(s). See Section 3 for examples of activity and Appendix 2 for a suggested range of measures and performance indicators.

Employer engagement as a core purpose

Success for all suggests that colleges and providers should be clear about their mission and focus on their strengths. For some colleges this could mean going beyond the headline improvement targets. LSDA has been developing the 'college for business'[7] model for colleges that see their core purpose as meeting the needs of the economy, employers and employees, as distinct from those with a primary mission to serve the needs of the community, or to prepare young people for higher education. The model is now being implemented in general FE colleges in the Sussex LSC area, but all providers may find some aspects of it useful when considering how to develop employer engagement.

Distinct dimensions of activity are suggested as core activities within the 'college for business'. They fall into two categories, according to whether they are about supply or demand.

An effective supply side needs to provide:

- *a gateway to the workplace* where initial knowledge and skills will be developed. This may be defined by age, ie for 14–19 year olds, but could also include HE graduates and returners to the workforce
- *adaptation and updating* where the current workforce will be provided with training to acquire new processes and adapt to new technologies.

To stimulate demand colleges or providers should be involved in:

- *problem-solving and innovation* where services to accelerate innovation, or solve business problems, will be developed
- *support networks for SMEs* which will promote the exchange of ideas and good practice.

In addition, the *mission and infrastructure* of the college or provider will need to be developed to support implementation of the model. The 'colleges for business' criteria suggest what changes may need to be made.

Links between the dimensions of the 'college for business' model

Although each of the dimensions of activity is valuable in itself, they can also reinforce each other and come together to enhance the capacity of the college or provider to serve the needs of business. There may also be benefits across all provision like those outlined below.

- There may be a correlation between the involvement of staff working with companies and success rates of full-time learners: although some staff may feel that time spent working with companies risks damaging the interests of their other learners, the experience gained and learning materials produced can result in more relevant mainstream provision, so improving retention and achievement.
- Staff who undertake development work with companies not only increase the likelihood of employers seeing the need for workforce development, but also gain staff development and updating for themselves.
- If colleges or providers help to establish or maintain networks of SMEs this may result in the creation of consortia to secure cost effective training, or enable groups of firms to collaborate in providing Modern Apprenticeships
- While monitoring work-experience placements for full-time students, staff may also identify other training from which existing employees could benefit.

See Appendix 1 for a description of the five dimensions of the 'college for business'.

Section 3

Examples of employer engagement

Setting, defining and agreeing targets

A key challenge for colleges and providers is their part in the substantial improvement in the skills of the current and future workforce necessary to support the UK's competitiveness.8 It is important that this work is recognised in the targets that are set, without these leading to unnecessary bureaucracy or becoming ends in themselves.

Each college or provider should choose, in negotiation with their local LSC, one[9] of two possible headline targets in relation to:

A the development of improved services direct to employers

B increased employability or work readiness of learners.

The measures set by colleges and providers should reflect skills needs across their local area or region and identify their role in meeting these needs, with performance indicators that demonstrate progress towards meeting the target. However, there is no single measure of employer engagement, and qualitative or quantitative measures may be appropriate according to the providers' mission and local circumstances.

The measures and performance indicators for employer engagement can relate to many aspects of a college or provider's work and should be seen as an important aspect of the 3-year development plan. A range of possible performance indicators / evidence are suggested by the LSC in Annex 3 of the *Guidance on the preparation of 3-year development plans*[10] and reproduced in this guide at Appendix 2. As with the examples provided in this guide, these are neither comprehensive nor prescriptive but form the basis for discussion between local LSCs and their colleges and providers.

Starting points

A central concern of the target-setting process is to move current good practice into a strategic framework. Securing employer engagement needs to become an acknowledged aim of all colleges and providers.

Consideration should be given to:

- what employers should expect a college or provider to offer as a minimum standard of service[11] (perhaps articulated in an employers' charter)
- relevant strategic priorities of the LSC and local and regional economies as identified in the LSC local strategic plan or the region's Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA)
- the extent of the current match with the above and what is on offer, and what employers take up
- existing good work in securing effective employer engagement and how this can be extended
- identifying urgent or strategic gaps in employer engagement, for instance in some key sectors, which may be revealed in the outcomes of local Strategic Area Reviews.

Diversity as strength

Providers and colleges will naturally wish to set challenging but realistic targets. For example, a small general college in a rural area may have a different role from an inner-city college with a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in Metatronics. This diversity should be seen as a strength, given that employers are not a homogenous group and will need customised approaches.

This section of the guide provides examples of how particular circumstances can be accommodated within the employer engagement measures being pursued by colleges. They illustrate the varied ways in which employer engagement can be promoted. Replicating the examples is not necessarily the way forward, as circumstances are likely to be different. Further consideration of the key points implicit in the examples, and how the ideas may be taken forward, may be more useful.

Headline improvement target A

The development of improved services direct to employers

Issue Employers may be deterred from securing professional qualifications for staff by administration and bureaucracy.

Good practice Providers should offer a dedicated service for employers seeking to accredit their in-company learning schemes

Example **London College of Fashion**, which has a CoVE, has two bespoke professional development awards, validated by Edexcel, addressing the needs of niche markets. Several companies, including Clarks Shoes, are interested in helping with the development of these awards. Clarks has an internal company diploma, which is not nationally validated, and the intention is to enable its employees to obtain a nationally recognised qualification. At the same time, Clarks' employees will contribute to the teaching on the London College of Fashion's courses.

Key point Helping companies to overcome the bureaucracy associated with learning or qualifications may stimulate their participation.

Taking it further A possible measure in relation to the above example could aim to increase the number of candidates (by x%)[12] converting the internal company diploma to a nationally accredited qualification.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- identification of potential in-company schemes to convert to national qualifications
- numbers of candidates
- employer and employee satisfaction.

Issue Employers can reasonably expect public funds to provide a potential workforce with good basic skills and some preliminary vocational learning. However, employers should pay for specific updating or services directly relating to their company's competitiveness.

Good practice Colleges should work with employers to ensure that the training they offer relates to the company's success, and is therefore a good investment.

Examples **Sandwell College** provides intensive training programmes for companies, such as Cadburys, and has provided a successful in-house commercial training programme in NVQ digital imaging to HSBC.

Telford College has established learning centres within local companies and dedicated significant resources to support in-company work. This work has resulted from the strategic vision of the college and shared purpose with other key players involved in local economic regeneration.

West Cheshire College is working with a large multinational company to upskill its operators in four of its UK manufacturing plants. After lengthy consultations and conducting training needs analyses with hundreds of employees, the college drew up a comprehensive training plan. A third of the operators have now been trained, and the company has quantified major savings in downtime and maintenance costs. A similar scheme for the company's engineers is about to get underway.

Key points

- Imaginative use of existing expertise and resources can support the development of customised provision.
- Taking provision to or near the workplace can increase in-company training.
- Installing learning workshops in the workplace will significantly improve participation.

Taking it further A possible measure in relation to the above could aim to secure repeat business in the same companies and extend the number of companies buying similar provision.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- increased numbers of commercial programmes requested by a wider range of companies
- increased income from customised provision
- employer satisfaction.

Issue Some employers' contributions may be 'in kind', helping to update college staff and provision, as well as providing extra resources. They may be in return for technical support, field-testing or expert advice for company development.

Good practice Colleges should be close to the relevant industries in relation to their provision, so that companies have an interest in supporting provision, and trust college staff to be able to offer good quality advice.

Examples **Leeds College of Technology** print media centre helped local companies by testing printing plates designed for water-based rather than solvent-based inks. In return for pre-field-testing the new plates the companies donated samples of them to the college for teaching purposes. The college has also developed online teaching materials in partnership with employers in the print industry.

Wigan and Leigh College is providing ongoing technical support for a small engineering company designing and producing innovative couplings for high-pressure hoses such as those used in the fire service. The owner-manager of the company creates the new designs, but needs occasional support for working drawings, technical calculations and testing of materials, which is paid for at commercial rates.

Many **land-based colleges** receive supplies from seed companies in return for reports on the performance of new varieties, and existing varieties in different conditions. For students, conducting such trials is a valuable learning experience, and involves them in working to industry standards.

NESCOT (Epsom's college of further and higher education) has great expertise in digital imaging that other organisations are prepared to pay consultancy rates for. This can involve some analysis of the organisations' systems and aims to identify needs. Other colleges have found a similar demand for their advice on CAD-CAM software.

Key points

- Companies may be interested in providing colleges with equipment and supplies where this contributes to training their current or future employees.
- An offer of action research or product-testing services may be more welcome to some companies than courses in the first instance, though it may well lead to a need for training later on. Joint work of mutual benefit to companies and colleges is likely to be found in most industries.[13]

Taking it further A possible measure in relation to this work could aim to increase employer awareness and take-up of the range of business-related services that the college provides (by x%).[14]

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- diversity in employer contributions
- capital investment from employers.

Issue There needs to be a critical mass of employers who see colleges and providers as the first port of call when seeking a business or training solution.

Good practice A sector or geographical focus for engaging companies may prove to be successful.

Examples **Plymouth College** has 'business rehearsal' clients who are planning to set up enterprises, and it will offer them support through its SME technical support and learning centre. This can include up to five days of on-site consultancy.

Bishop Auckland College, in partnership with IBM, the local district council and a training provider, established a digital factory in a local industrial park. This provides companies with training, consultancy and support services in leading-edge, software-based design technology and learners with opportunities to develop higher-level technology skills. It liaises closely with the Regional Development Agency to support new companies and provide access to design and development resources. This will help to develop local competitiveness by increasing the skills of the workforce and providing access to the latest technologies.

Bishop Burton College is setting up a Rural Enterprise Network, to enable rural businesses of various kinds, from smallholders to bed-and-breakfast providers, to meet for mutual support. The college plans to convene the meetings and provide technical and business-planning advice and associated training, as required.

The management centre at **Wigan and Leigh College**, in partnership with the North West Development Agency, has established the **Leigh Business Academy**. Supported and guided by local business, the academy offers a range of nationally accredited courses that develop managers, team leaders and supervisors in their occupational roles, as well as ensuring an effective understanding of health and safety issues and basic IT. This provision is delivered locally using supporters' own premises, so that companies can access high-quality staff development on their own doorstep.

Key points

- Convenience and easy access to good facilities is a selling point.
- Services to business may not just be about training.

Taking it further A possible measure in relation to this work could aim to engage with a targeted group of newly developing SMEs by providing relevant services in convenient locations.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- sector penetration
- delivery of a range of business solutions to start-up companies.

Issue Collaborative working may increase employer participation.

Good practice Collaboration between colleges and different types of provider can increase the value of provision and provide a one-stop shop for employers.

Examples In the north west **26 colleges** are part of a group which also includes six HE institutions, six training providers, and 30 employer groups. One benefit of this is that colleges approached by a local employer may make contact, on their behalf, with another college with more appropriate expertise or facilities.

City of Wolverhampton College and **Sandwell College** are working with companies in the creative industries to develop highly trained professionals. They provide training to both local SMEs and larger corporate clients. Spin-offs from this work are outlined below:

- sponsorship arrangements with Ilford Photographic, Wolverhampton City Centre Company, Black Country Chamber of Commerce and Business Link and Jessops Photographic
- further employer links with regional newspapers across the greater Midlands, along with the BBC WM, Heartzart (special occasion cards), Beacon Radio and WCR Radio plus an employers' forum to involve more businesses and practitioners in curriculum design and assessment and create a broader programme of work-placement opportunities
- support from equipment manufacturers keeping both colleges informed of technological advances within the industries.

The ELITE consortium of land-based colleges (**Myerscough**, **Hartpury**, **Bishop Burton** and **Sparsholt Colleges**) won a DEFRA contract to establish and manage a pilot scheme to test the effectiveness of different types of demonstration farms (and associated activities) in improving performance. The aim is to enhance both economic and environmental performance, and to integrate farms into the food chain and the rural economy.

Key points

- Partnership working could dramatically increase employer involvement.
- Sharing expertise and resources may improve the range and availability of the provision on offer.

Taking it further Setting measures for such arrangements may be complicated, but the benefits may outweigh the difficulties. It may be possible to enhance the availability and breadth of provision for employers by establishing a consortia of providers.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- increased volume of activity from a wider range of firms
- increased employer satisfaction
- repeat business.

Headline improvement target 8

Increased employability or work readiness of learners

Issue Colleges and providers play a major role in developing the capacity of young people entering the workforce and returners to the workforce.

Good practice Colleges and providers should regularly consult with their local, or sector, employer community on the relevance of their provision for 16–19 year olds.

Examples **Newcastle under Lyme College's partnership group** builds on relationships with the electrical and electronics industry. The group includes senior staff from seven companies and Advantage West Midlands (RDA), Staffordshire LSC, Newcastle under Lyme and Leek colleges. It makes key decisions on the curriculum and equipment, and advises on short-term training requirements.

At **Derby College** part-time professional musicians work with full-time performing arts students. A recording studio manager, the coordinator of Derby Arts in Education and a staff member from Derby University have all judged college competitions and are keen to help the college develop its provision. Visits from the Prince's Trust and the Musicians' Union are also booked.

West Cheshire College programme teams propose action to engage employers in their annual development plans, including more employers as speakers, more student visits to companies, more work experience placements, more employer contribution to course design, more work-based assessment and more sponsorship. Their annual employers' survey gauges willingness to be involved as well as measuring employer satisfaction with provision.

Designs on Britain is a collaboration between 14–19 year-old students and top UK architects. Students from **Christ the King Sixth Form College** produced a scale model and plan for Convoys Wharf, with murals, sculptures and a bridge across the Thames for an exhibition in Lewisham Town Hall.

Key points

- Colleges and providers should build on existing relationships.
- Clear tasks should be set to get the best out of employers' providing advice.
- Professionals from the industry should set the benchmark for performance.

Taking it further A possible measure related to the above could aim to increase employer involvement in the development of the curriculum in three subject areas.[15]

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- an increased number and varied size of firms taking part in such activity
- mention of the involvement with the college in the company's annual report
- an increased number of work placements in the company
- more students recruited to the company on completion of their course.

Issue Employability and work readiness are important aspects of the curriculum for 16–19 year olds.

Good practice Opportunities for the development of employability and work readiness should be integral aspects of the curriculum for young learners.

Examples Theatre studies and media students at **Coulsdon College** completed a joint media and film project in which two professional directors gave students a synopsis from which to write a script. The students and professionals then collaborated to make it into a film. Theatre studies students also took a production to the Edinburgh Festival. Students liaised with Festival organisers and arranged the publicity and venue, booking street space.

Employability skills and the work-related curriculum are developed at **Newham Sixth Form College** (NewVic) through the following means.

- *Work experience* Vocational programmes include work experience and A-level students are supported in work shadowing during holidays. Student apprenticeships, with a one-day a week work placement, are increasing.
- *Employability skills accreditation* Students gain a college diploma by undertaking careers research, attending employability workshops, gaining extra work related qualifications such as the British Tourist Board's 'Welcome' qualifications and taking part in work experience.
- *Young Enterprise* Approximately 50 students participate in this national scheme, forming and running real companies with mentors from local firms.
- *Team-based curriculum developments* Local employers participate in full-time courses across all curriculum areas. Activities range from visits from employers, visits to companies, student presentations to employers and commissioned work in response to employers' requests.
- *Careers education and guidance* All students complete a careers assignment to develop careers-research skills. A careers service is available to students throughout the year to provide interviews, group sessions and part-time/summer job clubs with a local employment agency.

Key points

- Opportunities to develop work readiness and employability may occur naturally within the mainstream curriculum.
- The development of these skills may contribute to maturation and motivation.

Taking it further A possible measure related to the above examples could aim to increase the number of full-time courses that include work readiness or employability preparation.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- destination data demonstrating increased numbers of learners progressing into employment related to their training
- increased employer satisfaction with the work readiness of trainees.

Issue Employers often complain that college provision is out of date.

Good practice Involving employers in the development of provision may increase their level of satisfaction with it.

Examples **SEEVIC College** has established links with a wide range of employers. These were enhanced by a breakfast conference to consider the college's application for CoVE status with delegates from the sport and leisure industry, head teachers, and representatives from other local employers and education providers. This proved extremely successful and led to a series of meetings that enabled further links and learner requirements to be identified. Productive working relationships are maintained through regular meetings and collaborative activities. Employers provide access to resources, work placements, advice on curriculum design and briefings for learners on industry issues.

City College, Manchester is leading a consortium of colleges developing training in logistics – an area where there is a lack of relevant pre-service and updating provision. A curriculum development advisory panel has been set up to include employers and meets regularly. Given the historical lack of credible specialist provision and the previous reluctance on the part of this industry to provide training, it is important to network very closely with the industry to create the confidence needed for the future. The consortium also has the support of the TUC, trades unions, the Basic Skills Agency, Jobcentre Plus and the relevant National Training Organisation.

The work-based training department in **Cornwall College** has been working with Pendennis Shipyard in Falmouth to tackle a skills shortage. A unique Modern Apprenticeship package was tailored to the needs of the company to develop both a skilled workforce in the short term and supervisors and managers for the future. A multi-skilled workforce has been created which contributes to the success of the company and to the local economy.

Key points

- Sector-based developments may secure more active employer engagement and encourage collaboration between employers.
- Other agencies have an interest in securing employer engagement and may welcome participation by the college or provider in their initiatives.

Taking it further A possible measure in relation to such work could be to develop training based on industry requirements and pilot this in three companies, with a view to extending the provision over the next 3 years.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- an increased focus on local skills and employer priorities
- an increased number and range of employers involved in design and development activity.

Issue Local and sector-specific skills shortages that emerge need speedy action if they are not to damage aspects of the economy.

Good practice Colleges should be in touch with local and sector needs and adapt their provision to meet emerging difficulties.

Examples **New College, Durham** is working with several major travel retailers to develop the future workforce's skills to meet identified shortages. The college has developed customised training to fulfil the local LSC's requirements. Work placements are provided for learners, and the college is liaising closely with its LSC to identify the skills and knowledge needed by the local economy to ensure these are reflected in the curriculum.

Retail, hospitality and tourism is one of the key employment sectors in Newham, East London. **Newham Sixth Form College** has worked with employers to provide customer service training in a variety of ways, including full-time short courses for unemployed adults linked directly to future jobs in a local national retailer and work-based learning placements using local companies.

Key points

- Develop credibility with the industry or sector by finding out about what they do and about their needs.
- Work in partnership with other players, such as trades unions or Sector Skills Councils, who have a common interest in learning.
- Find mutual benefits from activities, such as work placements.

Taking it further A possible measure in relation to this work could aim to develop young people with appropriate skills to meet identified shortages in key sectors of the local economy.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- employer involvement in the design of programmes
- take-up of provision.

Issue Employers engaged in work-based learning programmes may need to be kept up to date with developments and require specific support for their trainees.

Good practice Providers should support employers by providing general advice and support for specific activities that the employers find difficult to undertake alone.

Examples The training company **ITS**, which is a pathfinder CoVE, has produced an employer induction CD-ROM to develop awareness of health and safety and equal opportunities issues.

YMCA Training, Croydon, conducts an annual self-assessment process from which they devise development plans. The process involves seeking the views of employers through employer questionnaires and by inviting employers to attend programme review meetings. The views of employers and input into the review are seen to be very important in improving the service. Employers are also involved in the review meetings for trainees at their placement, which take place every 12 to 16 weeks. These meetings, which involve the training adviser, the employer and the trainee, enable all parties to play an active role in the training process and discuss progress and concerns. YMCA staff also keep employer contact logs so that they are able to monitor all liaison with employers.

Key points

- Relationship marketing is a key ingredient in gaining employer involvement in post-16 learning.
- Busy employers value succinct information about new developments in education and training.

Taking it further A possible measure in relation to employer engagement in work-based learning could be to contact employers periodically to investigate their projected requirements for trainees.

PIs (performance indicators) could include:

- increased numbers of trainee placements
- willingness of employers to take on more trainees.

Appendix 1 The 'college for business'

The five dimensions of a 'college for business' are described below.

1 Gateway to the workplace

This dimension encompasses provision that develops initial knowledge and skills. It could be defined by age of the learners, ie for 14–19 year olds, or by life stages, ie entrants to the labour market, such as HE graduates and returners to the workforce. This dimension focuses on providing a robust grounding in the basic principles of a subject or vocational area, together with the development of personal attributes and interpersonal skills, and an awareness of the demands of the world of work. It provides a bedrock on which the capacity to cope with changing demands can develop. Provision in this area could include college or work-based programmes, and increasingly may involve partnerships with schools, as pre-vocational provision and work experience for 14–16 year olds develop as a result of the proposals in *Success for all*.

To support this capacity, the college for business should provide:

- informed advice and guidance, facilitating appropriate choice and/or change of direction
- good induction and (re)orientation to the world of work
- diagnostic assessment related to vocational programmes and support for learning
- a broad, accessible vocational curriculum, facilitated by expert practitioners, informed by needs of the economy and local labour market
- college-based and work-based routes to learning
- rigorous development of theory and its practical application
- planned and purposeful work experience
- Enterprise education and the development of business acumen
- careers guidance and placement service
- access to recruitment and job-seeking services
- suitably qualified potential entrants to the workforce at a time that meets industry's demands
- progression (articulation) agreements with HE institutions to a range of HE provision, including foundation degrees
- advice on possibilities for further study
- opportunities for further study/flexible completion while at work.

2 Adaptation and updating

This dimension is concerned with the provision of training and learning opportunities for the current workforce to enable them to adapt to new processes and new technologies. Previous attempts to develop a more industry-focused FE service may have viewed this dimension as marginal and separate from the rest of the college. In the 'college for business' model, adaptation and updating is a core function of the college, with an impact on college infrastructure and administrative procedures.

The college for business should support updating and adaptation by providing:

- identification of training and/or development needs services for companies
- information, advice and guidance on education and training provision for individuals and employers
- diagnostic assessment of company and individuals' skills gaps
- easy access to vendor training and qualifications, such as Cisco Academy Training and Microsoft MOUS
- customisation/tailoring and packaging learning programmes
- unit accreditation/progression
- flexible timing and location of training – 24/7/52 anywhere
- a range of flexible delivery methods
- services to small businesses, eg start-up, expansion, recruitment, diversification, in cooperation with others, such as the Small Business Service, LSCs, other providers, etc
- workforce development firmly linked to employers' business support needs
- support for progression and development for individuals in the workforce
- support for the development of basic skills in the workforce
- support for companies to develop their in-house training capacity
- management training, contextualised to particular businesses.

3 Problem-solving and innovation

This dimension is concerned with the development of services to accelerate innovation or solve business problems. This activity should be interpreted broadly to encompass a range of services, other than training and training needs analysis, that help businesses to innovate and to improve performance through the application of research and existing knowledge. This dimension is critically dependent on the expertise of subject specialists in colleges and their ability to work with companies through action research and development.[18]

The college for business would support problem-solving and innovation in companies by providing services which:

- are based on problem-solving and action research
- emphasise the practical application of research findings
- produce timely and quick results at reasonable cost to the employer
- where appropriate, involve collaboration with others, such as professional bodies or HE institutions
- are used to inform the curriculum in the gateway and adaptation phases, to ensure it reflects current and future practice
- lead to demonstrable impact on the business
- provide support for testing or choosing equipment.

4 Support networks for SMEs

The college for business should be aware of the important role of small and medium-sized businesses in the local and national economies. This dimension would enable the college to play a vital role in supporting the exchange of ideas and good practice between small companies. This may be coordinated across the LSC area, and will necessarily involve collaboration with other providers of support.

To be effective in supporting networks of 'learning' companies, the college for business will need to demonstrate:

- knowledge of companies and their needs within the college's vicinity
- awareness of the work and contribution of other providers of support
- good relationships with other supporters of businesses
- active participation in the business community, eg through membership, active participation in Small Business Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, networks, etc
- dissemination of 'best practice' through peer support and opinion formers
- provision of information and impartial advice, eg arranging 'seeing is believing' visits, shadowing, mentoring, etc.

5 Underpinning mission and infrastructure

The college for business needs to have an underpinning mission and infrastructure that support the implementation of the other dimensions. This will require attention to:

- mission and strategy
- range and quality of staff
- administrative procedures, resources and accommodation
- learner support
- progression
- partnerships
- employer links
- transforming and extending partnerships.

Appendix 2 Headline improvement target for employer engagement

The following is quoted from Annex 3 of the LSC *Guidance on the preparation of 3-year development plans.*[17]

The guiding principle adopted is that agreement of a headline improvement target for employer engagement should:

- be based on an understanding of the local and regional skills needs of employers and employees;
- identify the role of colleges and providers in meeting these needs;
- agree a headline improvement target that supports this; and
- agree a measure and performance indicator(s) / evidence that demonstrates progress to meeting this target.

The employer engagement target will also support the Public Service Agreement target to reduce by at least 40% the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ Level 2 or equivalent qualification by 2010. To support this it is estimated that one million adults in the workforce need to achieve level 2 qualifications between 2003 and 2006, which presents a key challenge for colleges and providers of further education across the learning and skills sector.

Local LSCs will work with colleges and providers to help them determine a headline improvement target to drive up the responsiveness of provision to the skill needs of employers and employees. The headline improvement target agreed should be relevant to the individual college or provider's mission and the nature of their provision. Whilst colleges and providers may be committed to activity across both headline targets and a range of the measures and performance indicators, there is no requirement for any more than one headline improvement target and measure to be chosen and included in the development plan. We would anticipate that the headline improvement target and measure chosen might relate to either:

- **Area A**: the development of improved services direct to employers; ***OR***
- **Area B**: increased employability or work readiness of learners.

Table [1] below sets out a range of possible measures for different types of college and provider. A range of possible performance indicators / evidence is also suggested. The examples are not intended to be either comprehensive or prescriptive but to form the basis for discussion between local LSCs and colleges and providers. Whichever measure is chosen, it should, however, be institution-wide.

We have also included on the Success for All website www.successforall.gov.uk/ a Good Practice Guide to employer engagement which the Learning and Skills Development Agency have completed on behalf of the Council.

Appendix 2 continued

Table [2] headline improvement targets for employer engagement

Note: colleges and providers agree with their local LSC a measure and appropriate performance indicators/evidence (this may be one or a mix of several) to demonstrate progress in ONE area, either:

- the development of improved services and provision direct to employers, or
- increased employability or work readiness of learners.

Headline improvement target – Area A: Improved services direct to employers	
Examples of possible measures:	Examples of performance indicators / supporting evidence to demonstrate progress:
Delivery of a range of business solutions to employers Development of tailored business solutions Number of employers taking-up college provision Collaborative activity between providers in response to needs of employers Improved industry or technical expertise of teaching staff Repeat business in the same company, or extension of similar to new companies Engagement with groups of SMEs	• Fee income generation from employers • % increase of overall college funding from employers • Diversity of employer contributions (ie number and/or type of firms) • Capital investment from employers (including in-kind contributions) • Payment for tutor expertise • Customer feedback (Did the employer get value for money? Can increased satisfaction be demonstrated?) • Repeat business • Focus on local skill and employer priorities • Industrial secondments (two-way for example) • Identifying sector needs and developing courses appropriately • Revamping existing courses to meet employer needs • Business solutions tailored to the needs of employers • Training needs analysis conducted • Number of Employer sponsored learners / employed individuals taking part in learning • No. of Employers engaged in college / provider activity • Sector penetration • Differential Targets (eg x large employers and y SMEs taking part in staff development) • Employer involvement in the design, development and assessment of curriculum • Identifying sector needs and developing courses to meet those needs • Delivery of a range of business solution to employers • Collaborative working with other colleges / providersto meet needs of local employers • Flexible delivery mechanisms (time, location, use of ICT etc) • Work with intermediaries such as Business Link, Chambers, SSCs, Trade Organisations to identify needs and develop solutions • Business promotion activities – information and marketing, business breakfasts, etc • Involvement in employer forums/networks • New (and type) of college activities delivered to meet employer needs • Number of employers engaged with (as a percentage of the total in the local area) • Sector specific employers • Focus on local skill and employer priorities

Headline improvement target – AREA B: Improved work-readiness or employability of learners	
Example of possible measures:	Examples of performance indicator / supporting evidence to demonstrate progress
Work-experience placements Education-business links Enterprise opportunities Employer Days / Careers Fairs Work readiness programmes Employer involvement in the design, development and assessment of curriculum Training developed based on industry requirements, evaluation and mainstreaming Developing young people to match identified skills shortages	Customer feedback from both employers and learners (ie evaluation exercises) Increase in activity – eg number of extra placements, events etc Focus on local skill and employer priorities – eg placements to key industries etc Feedback from Inspection findings Increased number / range of employers involved in design and development activity Destination data demonstrates increased numbers of learners into employment Employers taking on increased numbers of trainees

Notes

1 See DfES (2002). *Success for all: reforming further education and training* and LSC Circulars 03/01 and 03/02 *Success for all: implementation of the framework for quality and success*. The final version of the circular and guidance on the preparation of 3-year development plans are published on the Success for all website at www.successforall.gov.uk

2 FE and sixth form colleges became incorporated on 1 April 1993.

3 DfES (2003). *21st century skills: realising our potential*. Cm 5810. HMSO.

4 Cabinet Office (2002). *In demand: adult skills in the 21st century: part 2* Cabinet Office.

5 *Provider responsiveness to employers*. Research undertaken by ECOTEC research and consulting for the DfES 2003.

6 *Provider responsiveness to employers*. Research undertaken by ECOTEC research and consulting for the DfES 2003.

7 A model for the 'college for business' is described in *Developing the 'college for business' in Sussex*, (LSDA June 2003).

8 The government estimates that 1 million adults in the workforce need to achieve Level 2 qualifications between 2003 and 2006. The employer engagement target will also support the Public Service Agreement target to reduce by at least 40% the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ Level 2 or equivalent qualification by 2010.

9 Many colleges will of course undertake activities relevant to both targets.

10 See the Success for all website at www.successforall.gov.uk

11 *Developing the 'college for business' in Sussex* (LSDA June 2003) provides a useful audit tool and a set of criteria that may help colleges articulate the levels of service provided for employers.

12 If quantitative measures are appropriate.

13 For other examples see *Further supporting business* (LSDA June 2003).

14 If quantitative measures are appropriate.

15 These areas should relate to LSC strategic priorities, or extend from an established base in these to different areas of the curriculum.

16 For more examples see *Further supporting business* (LSDA June 2003).

17 Available to download at http://3dp.lsc.gov.uk/docs/DevPlan/GuidanceEmplEngAnnexFINAL230503.doc

This guide provides ideas on how to engage employers effectively in post-16 learning. It gives examples of how colleges and providers are currently responding to the needs of employers and their employees, with suggestions for extending this practice. It should be of interest to LSC-funded colleges and providers and local Learning and Skills Councils when considering and agreeing headline improvement targets for employer engagement in response to *Success for all*.

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